Indo-Sri Lanka agreement on Kachatheevu Island

129. SHRI T.T.V. DHINAKARAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the traditional rights of Indian fishermen to fish around Kachatheevu Island and to dry their nets and rest in the Island are protected by the agreement under which the Island was given to Sri Lanka;

(b) if so, whether Sri Lanka has honoured this agreement in letter and spirit;

(c) whether Government views the attack on our fishermen by Sri Lankan Navy as violation of the said agreement; and

(d) if answer to part (c) of the question be in the negative, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) In an Exchange of Letters on the issue of fishing rights in 1976, the Government of India stated that "fishing vessels and fishermen of India shall not engage in fishing in the historic waters, territorial seas and the Exclusive Economic Zone of Sri Lanka." Indian fishermen, therefore, do not have the legal right to fish in the waters around Katchativu Island.

The 1974 Agreement on the demarcation of the International Maritime Boundary Line between India and Sri Lanka provides for access to Katchativu "as hitherto." Under the agreement, Indian fisherman are allowed access to the island for rest, for drying of nets and for the annual St. Anthony's festival. The right of access is not understood to cover fishing rights around the island.

(b) Yes, Except for the period 1983-2003 when the Sri Lankan Government banned fishing in Sri Lanka's northern waters on security grounds. Access to Katchativu Island was withheld during this period. After a Cease Fire Agreement between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE, access to the island was restored in 2003.

(c) The Sri Lankan Government has committed itself at the highest levels to treat the problem of straying fishermen in a humane and sympathetic manner. This was reiterated in the Joint Press Statement issued after the recent visit to India of the President of Sri Lanka

(Nov. 3-7, 2004) which states that "While agreeing to continue with the existing understandings on the humane treatment and early release of apprehended fishermen, it was decided to constitute a Joint Working Group which could meet frequently to deal with issues relating to straying fishermen, work out modalities for prevention of use of force against them and the early release of confiscated boats, and explore possibilities of working towards bilateral arrangements of licensed fishing."

(d) Does not arise.

Proposal for Employment Guarantee Act

130. SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHAVAN:

SHRI K. CHANDRAN PILLAI:

Will the Minister of LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any proposal to introduce the Employment Guarantee Act;

(b) if so, the details including the districts to which the above scheme is to be implemented, State-wise, category-wise as on today; and

(c) if so, the details including the source of fund and the amount of fund allotted/to be allotted for the above, programme-wise, category-wise as on today?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (SHRI K. CHANDRASEKHAR RAO): (a) to (c) The proposal to enact a Central Legislation for the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which aims to enhance livelihood security to poor households in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to every poor household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual labour, is under consideration of the Government.

Housing complex for women bidi workers

131. SHRI B.J. PANDA: Will the Minister of LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government propose to build low cost housing complex for women bidi workers in Solapur;